

Artists honored at SFSC's Juried Student Art Exhibition

Special to the Highlands Sun

South Florida State College's 2023 annual Juried Student Art Exhibition was held on Thursday, April 20, at the Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC) on the SFSC Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

Each award comes with a cash prize and, this year, \$2,500 was awarded to 12 outstanding SFSC student artists.

Sara Jackson's painting titled "Bamboo Shoots" was chosen for the President's Award.

The President's Award is chosen by SFSC President Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel and the chosen artwork becomes a part of the President's Art Collection at SFSC. The artwork remains on display in the office of the president for one year. It is then hung in the college's board room with previous years' President's Award winners. The artwork is also used as the image for birthday cards the president gives to SFSC faculty and staff throughout the year.

SFSC Juried Student Exhibition award winners for 2023:

- Award of Merit; Vivian George, Josie Wilson, Nico Diaz Silva, Jenny Wirries, Ruby Rivera, Lindsay Albritton, RoseMarie Klein
- People's Choice Award: Ruby Rivera for "The Process"
- Betty Stephens Docents' Choice Award: William Hernandez for "Reflections in Black & White"
- Best of Media, Ceramics: Ella Pepper for "Fly Free"
- Best of Media, Mixed Media: Jonathan Levene for "Mer@chandi\$e"
- Best of Media, Drawing: Soledad Morado for "Another Day"
- Best of Media, Photography: Josie Wilson for "Dark Triforce"
- Best of Media, Painting; Ella Pepper for "My Sisters and I"
- Lyn Latham Award for Computer Graphics: Lindsay Albritton for "Debbie the Elephant"
- Cathy Futral Award of Excellence: Ella Pepper for "Sink Down" and Ruby Rivera for "Reflections"
- Dorry Christy Memorial Scholarship Award: Lindsay Albritton
- Max Gooding Best of Show Award:



COURTESY PHOTOS

Guests mix and mingle Thursday, April 20, during South Florida State College's 2023 annual Juried Student Art Exhibition at the Museum of Florida Art and Culture at the college in Avon Park.



South Florida State College President Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel presents the President's Award to Sara Jackson as they stand in front of her painting titled "Bamboo Shoots."



SFSC student Ruby Rivera, left, wins an Award of Merit, the People's Choice Award, and the Tanglewood Artist Group Award for Continuing Art Majors. Members of her family join her at the art show.



Josie Wilson, left, wins Best of Media in Photography titled "Dark Triforce" and an Award of Merit. Karla Respress with the college presented the award.



Lindsay Albritton, center, wins the Dorry Christy Memorial Scholarship Award and an Award of Merit. Karla Respress, with the college, and Max Gooding were on hand to make the presentation.



Jenny Wirries, left, wins an Award of Merit. Karla Respress with the college presented the award.

Kat Sassatelli for "Boardwalk"

• Tanglewood Artist Group Award for

Continuing Art Majors: Kat Sassatelli and Ruby Rivera

The student exhibition

will remain on view at MOFAC now through Thursday, May 19.

MOFAC is located on the

SFSC Highlands Campus at 600 West College Dr. in Avon Park. For more information about the

exhibition or MOFAC, call the Museum Office at 863-784-7130 or visit mofac.org.

SFSC Dental Hygiene graduates honored with pinning ceremony

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) honored graduates of its Dental Hygiene program in a traditional pinning ceremony in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park on Thursday, May 4. The graduates had just completed their Associate in Science in Dental Hygiene.

Receiving their pins were Maritza Banda, Danielle Lyn Barnhill, Chenoa Grace Bond, Jeanette Contreras, Baylea N. Dery, David Moises Fernandez-Castanon, Ivy G. Main, Cyntia G. Olvera, Kindall Aynnalee Patton, Maria Tirado, Ashley Elizabeth Tufts, Nakisha M. Whetton, and Kimberly M. Wright.

Dr. Michele Heston, SFSC vice president for academic affairs and student services, welcomed the Dental Hygiene graduates and offered words of wisdom. "No exercise is better for the human heart than reaching down and lifting someone else up, to serve others, and to enrich your community,"



COURTESY PHOTO

Upon completing the Dental Hygiene program, these recent graduates become dental hygienists by passing the National Dental Hygiene Board Examination and the Florida State Clinical Licensure Examination.

she said. "This truly defines a successful life, for success is personal and it is charitable and it is the sum, not of our possessions, but of how we helped others."

Graduates were presented their dental hygiene pins by Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair of SFSC's Dental Education program.

Addressing the graduates, Milliken offered parting words of advice: "The faculty is so proud of you and the work you've accomplished. It is my task to leave you with things to consider about where to go from here.

"Don't forget about yourself," she said. "This is a time that will never come again. The choices

you make will have an impact on where you go from here. As you're exploring your options for employment, understand the people you're trying to connect with. Be aware of the people around you. They're looking to you for guidance, help, support, friendship, and care, even on your bad days. As you're re-entering a community that you've probably neglected for the last few years, invest in your community where people need you. Look for opportunities to be there for others who can benefit from your gifts. You have a lot to offer. And there are many who have a lot of needs. And remember to thank God for your many blessings

and share those thanks with others."

Special recognition was given to four of the graduates. The Golden Scaler Award was presented to Ashley Tufts for demonstrating remarkable skill and talent over the course of her classes. The Colgate Student Total Achievement Recognition (STAR) Award was presented to Chenoa Bond for showing excellence and commitment to the Dental Hygiene profession. The Community Award was presented to Baylea Dery for her special interest/achievement in community dentistry and dental public health. The Outstanding Student Award was presented to Cyntia Olvera.

Upon completing the Dental Hygiene program, graduates become dental hygienists by passing the National Dental Hygiene Board Examination and the Florida State Clinical Licensure Examination. They can, then, work alongside a dentist as a member of a dental health care team.

For more information about SFSC's Associate in Science in Dental Hygiene, call Danielle Ochoa, Health Sciences advisor, at 863-784-7027 or email healthsciences@southflorida.edu.

Real Local News in
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Nursing Graduate Achieves Her Lifelong Dream

Special To The Herald-Advocate

Carol Mitchell graduated from South Florida State College (SFSC) on Tuesday, May 9 when she earned her Associate in Science in Nursing (ADN). In fact, she was the student Commencement speaker for the 4 p.m. ceremony. She is also the first person in her family to graduate from college.

During her 45 years, she's held many jobs — patient care technician, medical secretary, realtor, licensed practical nurse, radiology technician, and even truck driver. Her life took twists and turns but it always came back to the desire to serve and care for others.

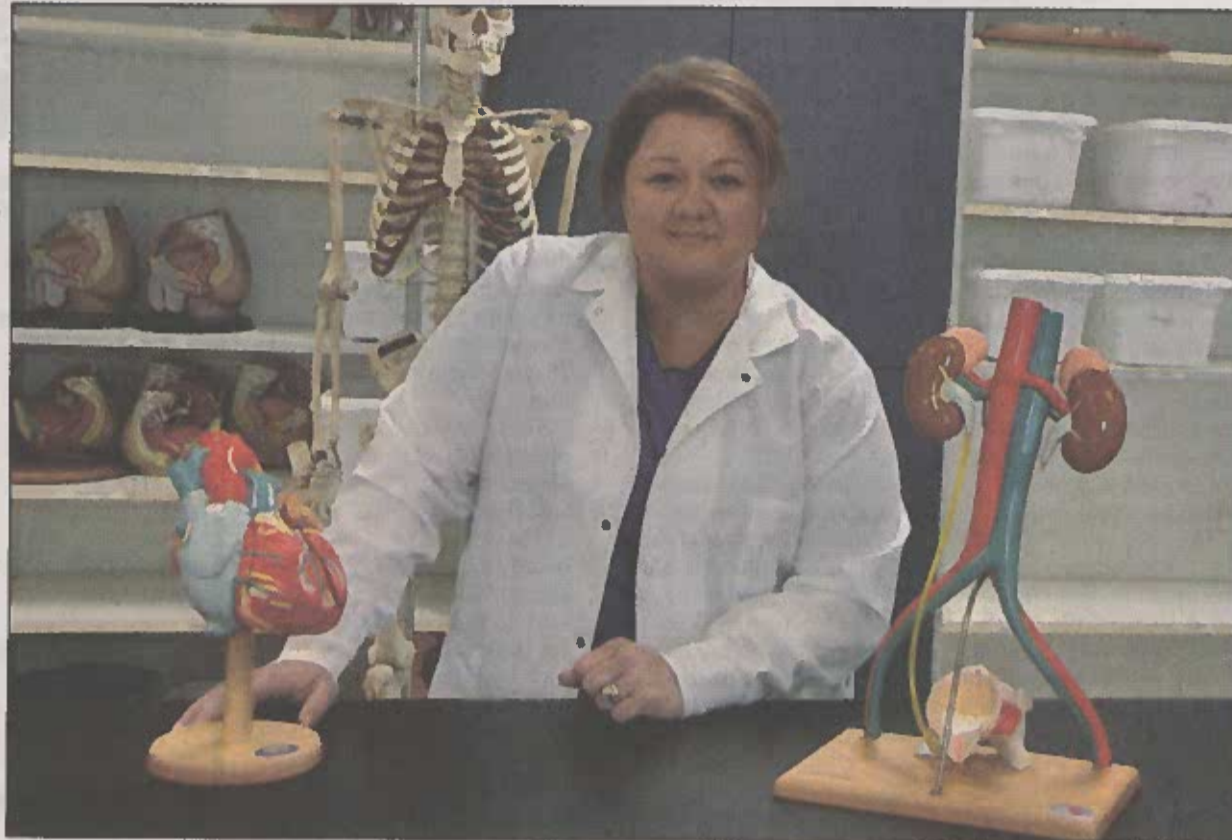
"When I was 18, I helped a friend care for a woman in her home," Mitchell said. "She was Tess Miller, the matriarch of the Miller's Central Air family. I fell in love with the ability to come into someone's life and care for them and try to make their day a little better. Some people just do it for a paycheck, but some do it because they feel good about helping others. Working with Tess was why I got my Patient Care Technician certificate at SFSC."

After working as a patient care technician and a medical secretary, Mitchell made a foray into the real estate business. In the early 2000s, her sister was a realtor and she invited Mitchell to work with her.

"The market was such that you could practically walk across the street and someone would want to sell their house," she said. "When I went to work in real estate, I excelled. I made over \$300,000 my first year."

But when the market took a downturn, health care called Mitchell back and she applied to SFSC's Practical Nursing program and, eventually, became a licensed practical nurse (LPN).

Mitchell's first job out of college was in a physician's office. When the office lost its X-ray technician, the doctor offered to send Mitchell through a Radiologic Technician program. She practiced nursing and radiography in the physician's office until her mother-in-law, a quality assurance director at a psychiatric and behavioral health facility in Okeechobee, mentioned that they had an opening for a nurse.



COURTESY PHOTO

Carol Mitchell recently graduated from South Florida State College after earning an Associate in Science in Nursing degree.

"It was a youth prison," Mitchell said. "Although I wasn't interested at first, my mother-in-law convinced me to apply. And the experience was life-changing."

"At the facility, I worked as a nurse in the infirmary," Mitchell said. "A boy had a seizure and the teachers and other boys panicked. Often, during emergencies, people panic, and their brains shut down. In this instance, no one was helping the boy. I did CPR on him for five minutes. His heart had stopped and he was unconscious. I was able to get his heart started and he was breathing, but he wasn't conscious. Then the EMT got there and took him to the hospital. When the boy returned to the facility three days later, he came to the infirmary. He said, 'I heard that I have your breath.' I laughed and said, 'You've got more than a little bit of my breath.' He cried and asked me, 'Why did you do that? Why would you do that for me? Nobody would have done that for me.' I said, 'Of course, I would have.'

"What stands out is the appreciation this child who was in prison had for my breath saving his life, that he felt as if he didn't deserve it," she said. "That stays with you because you realize that's where you belong and that's what you should be doing — helping to care for others."

Mitchell, eventually, wanted more. After a brief stint working as a truck driver alongside her husband, she made her way back to SFSC and entered its Associate in Science in Nursing program.

Everyone has challenges in their lives and, with great personal strength and determination, Mitchell had overcome a big one. When she was 15 years old, she was sexually assaulted and became a teen parent.

"It would have been easy to let it consume my life and give up my dreams," she said. "But I refused to let it define me, take me off course, and keep me down."

Mitchell explained that a high school teacher had called her an

abomination and an embarrassment and that Mitchell shouldn't be allowed to attend high school because she was pregnant.

"She didn't know my story," Mitchell said. "To this day, those words still hold weight. But, instead of letting them define me, I used them as motivation to push myself forward and focus on being the best version of myself. My parents' love gave me the foundation I needed to keep going. I was determined to use my voice to make a difference and propel me toward my goals and a better future for myself and my daughter, Haley, who is now a decorated soldier in the United States Air Force. She's the best part of me."

Mitchell is deciding how she wants to move forward in her career.

"I love the operating room and critical care," she said. "However, I haven't decided what the next step will be. There are so many opportunities for nursing. If I stay locally, I want to participate in a residency

program that both AdventHealth and HCA have offered. I just haven't decided what area I want to go into. I want to be well-equipped as a nurse and know everything I can before I get out there and start practicing. I want to work toward a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, then a master's degree in Nursing, and maybe become a nurse practitioner. That's the long game. I don't know if I'll have that done by age 80."

Mitchell has advice for people who think they can't go to college.

"The biggest problem I have is when someone says, 'I'm too old, it would be too hard, or I can't afford to go back to college right now.' Have a meeting with yourself. Get to SFSC and speak with someone about placement tests and see where you're at. If you need help, the College has tutors in math, English, science, or foreign languages. Then, there's financial aid. Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and see where you're at. You may be qualified for funding such as scholarships and grants. There are programs that pay you while you go to college. Check out the academic and workforce programs offered at SFSC and see what you're interested in. They may have a program that you didn't even know existed."

Mitchell is particularly proud of her college career and all she has attained. She was vice president for the Phi Theta Kappa honor society; she served as a student ambassador during the College's 10-year reaffirmation for accreditation; she was a proctor, lab assistant, and tutor in the Natural Science Department; and she participated in undergraduate research and presented that research at student and professional science conferences. And she graduated with a 4.0 GPA.

"I'm proud of the fact that I persevered and never gave up," Mitchell said. "Those people who are 20 years ahead of me in their careers — it doesn't matter. I'm proud that I graduated and will be a registered nurse. That achievement is different for me than someone who graduated from high school and kept going. It might be exciting for them, but is monumental for me. I'm just proud of where I am."



Tina Stetson, director of financial aid at South Florida State College, and Jamie Bateman, VP for institutional advancement and external affairs at SFSC. COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC Foundation Receives \$90,000 Grant For Part-Time Students And Students Who Are Parents

Special To The Herald-Advocate

A \$90,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County has been awarded to the South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation Inc. to benefit part-time students and student-parents who are attending SFSC in summer 2023, fall term 2023, and spring term 2024.

The grant comes from the Edward K. Roberts Community College Fund, which was established by Roberts as a legacy to support Florida's community colleges and other charitable organizations. Managed by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, the fund continues Roberts' vision of making higher education a priority, particularly for those motivated to seek better lives for themselves.

SFSC's grant funds are designated to aid students who attend college part-time and may not qualify for other forms of financial aid and students who are parents, whether single or married. Individual students may

ceive up to a maximum of \$2,500 through the end of the grant period, March 2024. The grant covers tuition, housing, books, childcare, transportation, and needs that would otherwise prevent students from attending college.

At least \$30,000 of the \$90,000 will be allocated for students at the SFSC DeSoto Campus in Arcadia. It will provide scholarships for parents referred through the Parent Resource Center at the DeSoto County School Board, for graduates of DeSoto County High School who participate in the Links2Success program, for recent dual enrollment high school graduates in need of summer session funding support, for Panther Prep participants to cover for-credit courses during the summer bridge program, and any other DeSoto Campus student following the general criteria of the grant.

Scholarship recipients are identified by SFSC's Office of Financial Aid. Students must complete the Free Ap-

Aid (FAFSA) for any Pell Grant-eligible programs.

"Because of grants from organizations such as the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, the SFSC Foundation can support the educational goals of SFSC's students," said Jamie Bateman, SFSC vice president for institutional advancement and external affairs. "The funds from this grant allow our students to concentrate on their studies and prepare for personally and financially rewarding careers. This grant also addresses the needs of parents. With this financial support, students can achieve their higher education goals."

For information, contact the SFSC Foundation at 863-453-3133 or email foundation@southflorida.edu. For the Edward K. Roberts Scholarship application, see southflorida.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Edward-K-Roberts-Scholarship-Application.pdf

For information about the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, visit cfsc.org.

Drs. Vinod and Tarlika Thakkar Inducted Into SFSC Foundation Legacy Society

Special To The Herald-Advocate

During the South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation Legacy Showcase and Fundraiser on Saturday, May 6, Drs. Vinod and Tarlika Thakkar were inducted into the 2023 Legacy Society for their service to the Foundation, the College, and the community. Jamie Bateman, SFSC vice president for institutional advancement and external affairs, made the presentation.

"Drs. Vinod and Tarlika Thakkar have been friends of our community for many years," Bateman said. "Their support and dedication to help advance students through scholarship opportunities and in the medical field have been tremendous. Over the past couple of decades, the Thakkars have donated to SFSC in a way that would help nursing students achieve their goal of obtaining a nursing degree and entering into the health care field. It is a privilege to recognize them with the SFSC Foundation Legacy Award. They are the epitome of what a donor looks like. It's an honor to call them friends."

This is the fifth year that such an honor has been bestowed. Ben Hill Griffin III was posthumously inducted into the Legacy Society in 2022, Bill and Lisa Jarrett in 2021, Joan Hartt in 2020, and Joe Jr. and Gloria Davis in 2019.

Dr. Vinod C. Thakkar has

"I first met the Thakkars when I became part of our YMCA in the early 90s," said John Shoop, mayor of Sebring and Highlands County YMCA board of director's treasurer. "They donated many funds, from a building campaign to scholarships for our kids. They continue to help us on an annual basis through our Strong Kids campaign, helping kids and families who can't afford to come to the YMCA to be part of the programs and part of our community. If it wasn't for the Thakkars, our YMCA wouldn't be where it is today. It is such a force in our community."

Mike Swaine, a Highlands County attorney, discussed the Thakkars' support of education.

"By providing funds for the SFSC Foundation to carry on certain projects creates a better educational atmosphere, a better foundation for it, and it supplements what the state government can and will do. The Highlands County Bar Association provides a scholarship fund through the SFSC Foundation for young people who might not otherwise be able to attend SFSC or another college. That is something the Thakkars believe in doing. In talking to Vinod, he sees education as a way for people to rise above whatever level they started out at. The Thakkars have seen the benefit of education and they encourage others to get an

thought is their commitment to family, community, health care, and education," said Dr. Michele Heston, SFSC vice president for academic affairs and student services and a registered nurse since 1982. "They've supported educational excellence at all levels, from their work in the local health care facilities, to the elementary schools, to the College. Their passion and focus is a healthy and thriving community. Their mission is truly lived."

Dr. Heston continued: "They have an unwavering commitment to excellence in all aspects of life, whether it be through the Thakkar Award, recognizing educational excellence and leadership at the middle schools, by providing monetary recognition for nursing students for clinical and academic excellence, or hosting events at their home featuring healthy fare."



Dr. Vinod Thakkar, Dr. Tarlika Thakkar, Michael Kelly, SFSC Foundation Board of Directors secretary; and Jamie Bateman, SFSC vice president for institutional advancement and external affairs, at the SFSC Foundation Legacy Showcase.

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